

Scrutiny Working Group

<p>Scrutiny Working Group Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage</p>	<p>Lead Convenor: Cllr Inchley Members: Cllrs Ham, Phripp, Dunk, Boyden, Hayden, Clarke.</p>
<p>Date Meetings held on: 8 July 2021 15 July 2021</p>	<p>Series of meetings have been held since the last Scrutiny Meeting and the following are high level records of areas covered for the first two. A third meeting has been held and will be reported on, alongside the fourth planned meeting, at the September Scrutiny.</p>
<p>Meeting 8th July The group has presentations from Public Health on the impacts of deprivation on health and inequality. The message from them was strongly that deprivation and health inequality is linked. The meeting was recorded and provided to those members of the Group who could not attend. The Group discussed with the presenters the possible areas that could be considered for action by the District and what actions might be open to the Council as part of its duties. Areas that were considered were as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investment in active travel routes as a way of giving health opportunities and improved access where public transport or a private car are not available. 2. Utilise planning policies such as DP7 to improve the design and amenity opportunities. 3. Improve housing standards through higher design levels in planning. 4. Engage with community groups to help support them to deliver initiatives that they identify. 5. Recognising that people need somewhere for their bicycles if using public transport, lobby for storage on buses. 6. Promote to people their rights as regards employment and work to help address discrimination and disadvantage. 7. Look at policies being developed to see if actions might be included in them to improve disadvantage. <p>Meeting 15 July 2021 The group was joined by representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions, Citizens Advice Mendip and also Exeter University. The group received a short presentation on the benefits available to people and then discussed a series of questions raised by the group previously. CA Mendip invited all councillors to join them for a day to shadow the work of the organisations and see what happens and services they offer.</p>	

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DWP spoke about the variety of programmes that they have available to help support people to be able to get back into work. The group discussed the importance of work being sufficiently well paid as to allow people to live and how 'any job' was not the answer. DWP confirmed that they have the ability to help fund training where people have aspirations but lack suitable qualifications.

The group also touched on the use of bailiffs, the way people in difficult situations act under stress by ignoring letters or not opening mail, the difficulties advocates find in engaging with the benefits system and the importance of human contact.

Possible areas for consideration going forward where discussed as follows:

1. The creation of a peer to peer support scheme which enable people to get support from peers who have experienced the system and can help others negotiate it. This would need a funded co-ordinator but DWP would consider a business case to match fund such a post.
2. The creation of a single point of contact in the Benefits Team who can act as an advocate for highly vulnerable clients and who people like CA Mendip can contact in times of emergency. DWP have something similar in their two offices in Mendip which works very well.
3. Look again that the quality of the letters sent out by Revs and Bens, have them checked by a plain English specialist to make them more user friendly.
4. Look to use other alternative routes to communicate with clients regarding Revs and Bens matters, not just letters. Vulnerable and/or stressed people often do not open their mail.
5. What the council might do to help support Mendip CA to get more debit advisers.

Agreed Actions

- To speak with Rev and Bens Team regarding issues raised. (Note: this has been done and will be picked up at the meeting of 25th August)
- To utilise the thoughts and discussions when meeting next with Community Enablers, to understand what actions might help support the community.

Next meeting date/ location
3pm 25 August 2021 on Teams

Person booking
Tracy Aarons